

Sunday, June 17, 2012

Craig Keener on Miracles

To date I have not devoted a specific entry on my blog to a discussion of miracles. This is partly due simply to more important priorities, lack of time, and the fact that I'd expect anyone familiar with my worldview could surmise why I reject miracle claims. But it's very simple: the notion of 'miracle' presupposes a universe governed by the primacy of consciousness metaphysics, and we can know this because it denotes an event in which some or all entities involved are under the direct control of a supernatural *will* - i.e., a form of consciousness. Since I reject any version or expression of the primacy of consciousness, I consequently reject the notion of miracles since the notion of miracles is an expression of the primacy of consciousness.

The Christian doctrine of miracles is a vital component of Christianity's version of [the cartoon universe premise](#). The Christian god willing the universe into existence is analogous to a cartoonist creating his cartoon world: everything in the cartoon world is what the cartoonist wants it to be and does what the cartoonist wants it to do, just as in the universe which the Christian imagines, everything is what his god wants it to be and does what his god wants it to do. Just as the Christian god has a "plan" for all of human history, the cartoonist has a plan for his cartoon.

Now in spite of the blatant falsity of the primacy of consciousness and the grotesque absurdity of the cartoon universe premise, Christians openly and apparently unashamedly defend the notion of miracles. Cornelius Van Til tells us that "miracles are at the heart of the Christian position" (*The Defense of the Faith*, p. 27) and elsewhere he writes "kill miracle and you kill Christianity" (*Christian-Theistic Evidences*, p. i). Since belief in miracles plays a central role in distinguishing Christian devotion, we cannot expect all adherents of Christianity to acknowledge the irrationality involved in such belief. In fact, apologists will vehemently insist that non-believers are irrational for doubting or rejecting miracle claims.

Professor of New Testament studies Craig Keener has recently published a two-volume (yes, two volumes!) defense of miracles in his book *Miracles: The Credibility of the New Testament Accounts* (product information can be found [here](#)). At a total of 1172 pages, I wonder if this constitutes what David "Ryft Braeloch" Smart and Sye Ten Bruggencate mean by "argumentum ad verborum."

To promote sales of his books, Keener put in some face time since the publication of *Miracles*, and [an excerpt from one of his video appearances](#) recently came to my attention. In this video, Keener is being interviewed by Lindsay Bodkin, of Asbury Theological Seminary, who asks Keener how he would respond to those who do not believe miracle accounts. Below is my own transcript of this video:

Bodkin: I think for many of us who have not experienced miracles or know someone who's experienced a miracle, it seems foreign. And our society relies so heavily on modern science. What would you say to skeptics who fall in line with David Hume and say they just don't exist?

Keener: I would say that when you're dealing with any other kind of subject, you pay attention to what reliable eyewitnesses say. If you hold your philosophic premise so tightly because you haven't experienced it, that you doubt everybody else has experienced it, if you're willing to call hundreds of millions of people liars, to defend your philosophic premise, wouldn't it be worth rethinking whether your philosophic presupposition might be open to reconsideration?

I was an atheist before my conversion, so I have some sympathy for the skeptical approach. And I struggled with it some. Even though I had seen some miracles, even though I had experienced some miracles, I always thought 'well, you can come up with some other explanation, if you have to'. And ultimately, people can always come up with some other explanation. Sometimes people actually do come up with an explanation, they say "Well we don't have any naturalistic explanation for this now, but maybe we will someday," and that's good enough for them.

But unless you hold inflexibly to such a presupposition, is that really naturally where the evidence would lead you? If a person is open-minded, and comes to this openmindedly, we have so many eyewitness accounts. It seems to me that we really need to consider - some of these can be explained in other ways.

But when you have multiple raisings from the dead. In my own circle, I mean if, if it were only a coincidence, say a one in ten thousand coincidence, how do you explain the coincidence of me having ten people in my own immediate circle who are eyewitnesses of that?

Bodkin: It gets hard to ignore it then.

Keener: It gets very hard.

Now, I do not find it hard in the least to ignore claims about “the paranormal,” be they claims about miracles, ghosts, fortune-telling, etc. And I have all confidence that I am not ignoring some important fact about the universe when doing so. Living in SE Asia, I hear about ghost stories nearly every day from the locals. The locals are, to varying degrees, consumed with mysticism and captivated by superstition. Many people here in Thailand, for instance, are afraid to go to public bathrooms by themselves, as they fear that ghosts may be haunting them. When I tell them that I do not “believe in ghosts,” they seem disappointed, almost quietly outraged, as though I were spoiling something they’ve come to accept but privately know is not true.

So I have to say that I am just not persuaded by Keener that I should “pay attention to what [allegedly] reliable eyewitnesses say.” Why does Keener immediately defer to “eyewitnesses” instead of to *facts*? Well, it’s obvious: if he acknowledges that we should go by the facts, he would have to produce them and show how they support the miracle claims in question. Instead, he wants to train his attention on what he calls “reliable eyewitnesses,” which really means he wants to settle the matter by consulting hearsay and ignoring what the facts might have to say.

Christians might retort that we learn many things about the world by means of personal testimony. And of course this is true. But it would not follow from the fact that we often learn things about reality by means of testimony, that we should therefore accept every testimony as truthful. We need a standard, and the only *rational* standard is *reason*. If a testimony doesn’t pass the smell test of reason, then one is justified in rejecting it. Indeed, in such a case one would *not* be justified in accepting it.

A rational individual *discriminates* between those testimonies which are compatible with reason and those which are not. There are many reports which I have not accepted, either because they have no evidence to support them, or because they simply defy the available evidence, including those fundamental evidences which ground reason itself, such as the primacy of existence.

There may be many testimonies about miracles; I am confident that Keener has collected more than an armful in his apologetic quest to justify his commitment to faith. But a claim is not its own evidence, nor is it a substitute for evidence. On the contrary, evidence is what is needed to support a claim. (And the evidence for this point itself are the facts pertaining to the nature of man’s consciousness and the means by which he discovers and validates knowledge.) In the case of miracle claims, since they necessarily assume the primacy of consciousness, they thereby defy evidence which is both available to us and incontestable in nature, and consequently should be rejected, even if believers in such things disapprove.

In framing her question for Keener, Bodkin says that “society relies so heavily on science,” which suggests that the degree to which “society” does this is *excessive*, as if society’s dependence on science had exceeded some tolerable limit or overstepped some invisible boundary. In essence, there is a tone of resentment for science from theists when they defend the notion of miracles and other religious doctrines. They see science and reliance on science as obstacles to the propagation of their faith. And rightly so. Science is essentially the systematic application of reason to some specific area of inquiry. There is no question that reason and religious faith are epistemological adversaries: reason adheres consistently to the primacy of existence, and faith grants metaphysical primacy to consciousness. There can be no compromise between the two. A position secured by a consistent application of reason has no place, need, or room for faith; and a position accepted on faith will not sustain the demands, scrutiny or challenges of reason. Faith and reason are antipodes, regardless of how strenuously religionists deny this.

Before the Age of Reason, it was not uncommon for Christians to own up to the fact that their religious views were antithetical to reason. In his book *Table Talk*, church reformer Martin Luther wrote:

Reason is the greatest enemy that faith has: it never comes to the aid of spiritual things, but--more

frequently than not --struggles against the divine Word, treating with contempt all that emanates from God. (p. 353)

[Elsewhere Luther is purported to have written](#) that “faith must trample under foot all reason, sense, and understanding.” To say that “faith must trample under foot all reason, sense, and understanding,” is to say that faith needs to steamroll over the human mind and turn it into a useless, impressionable pulp. Because the human mind identifies and integrates the objects it discovers in reality by means of reason, anything that is intended to destroy reason is geared towards destroying the human mind.

Since reason is “the faculty that identifies and integrates the material provided by man’s senses” (Ayn Rand, *The Virtue of Selfishness*, p. 20), any philosophy which denies the validity of the senses, posits a realm of beings beyond the reach of the senses (e.g., “supernatural” beings), and/or affirms some non-sensory (or nonsensical) mode of awareness (which is ultimately indistinguishable from imagination), is an expression of anti-reason. This of course includes apologetic programs which contest the validity of the senses. Such contrivances essentially deny the validity of consciousness as such, while ignoring the fact that they require the use of one’s consciousness to do so.

Of course, many Christian apologists might react to this by pointing out that they have rigorously logical arguments, and that they develop their doctrines and ideologies in strict conformance with logical norms. It is true that many Christians know how to put together a syllogism and draw a conclusion from supporting premises. That is well and good. However, while logic is the method which reason uses to validate knowledge and integrate newly validated knowledge into the sum of what one knows, logic *by itself* does not constitute reason. Logic provides the formal structure for knowledge, but it does not provide its *content*. For that, we need to look to reality; and for that, we need to attend to the objects of our awareness existing in the world, and that awareness is *perceptual* in nature.

Students of logic know that a formally valid argument can be assembled to prove any conclusion one desires; its premises can be objectively true, or they can be completely arbitrary, or some insidious mixture of both (which is the more lethal to human cognition). The logical structure of knowledge can be simulated in the context of content which has no objective basis in reality, and this is essentially what we find in religion.

The West’s embrace of reason has put religion on the defensive, even though this embrace has wavered significantly over the past century or more. And although today’s apologists typically will not admit it, their religion has been on the retreat ever since the Age of Reason, and that’s because their worldview is incompatible with reason. This is why Christians since the dawn of the Renaissance have locked horns with the discoveries of science, especially in the life sciences. From dissecting human bodies to the advent of anesthesia, from the scientific exploration of human reproduction to the theory of evolution, Christianity has been the ever-present vocal opponent to scientific advances whenever they’ve seen the light of day. And it will continue to do so. Consider the recent opposition to stem-cell research. The systematic application of reason to specific areas of man’s life, is bound to raise the ire of the more zealous (and consistent) religionists.

The question I have at this point for Keener, then, is: how does one determine whether or not someone who claims to be an eyewitness to a miracle is “reliable”? This is an open question, for Keener clearly assumes that there is such a thing as a reliable witness to a miracle in the first place. I would hope that Keener would address this matter in his double volume work. But he gives no indication of how he might address this in the brief clip. Numerous epistemological issues would have to be considered if one dares to take miracle claims seriously. For instance, how did the individual who claims to have witnessed a miracle, make the determination that what he witnessed was in fact a miracle? How did he determine that he was not perchance mistaken? What exactly did he perceive, and by what methodology did he identify what he perceive as a miracle? Christian apologists are constantly barraging us with the “How do you know?” line of questioning. Well, how are we supposed to know that some event claimed to be miraculous in nature really is miraculous? The question “How do you know?” only seems to apply in opposition to non-believers; theists themselves typically give no guidance on how one could rationally come to the knowledge they claim for themselves. The problem is exacerbated all the more if at the same time we’re also told that the senses are not valid.

But seriously, this seems to be quite an epistemological quandary. If a person observes event X and says it’s a miracle, how does he know this? We’re constantly being reminded by Christian apologists that we don’t know

everything, and in fact that's true. It's true for everyone; omniscience is a fiction. There are many things we still have yet to understand about the world, about nature, about what exists and the nature of the things that exist, even things we have not discovered yet. Isn't the Christian showing himself too hasty by immediately claiming the event is a miracle? Does he feel that it's not necessary to rule out possible natural (i.e., rational) explanations before settling on attributing the event to some supernatural force? After all, supernatural agents are supposed to be invisible, beyond the reach of perceptual awareness.

Here is another area to probe. If a person claims that an event which he has witnessed firsthand is indeed miraculous, does he also claim to have actually observed a supernatural agent causing the allegedly miraculous event to happen? Are not supernatural agents invisible and thus beyond the reach of man's perceptual faculties? Or, do they flash into perceptual range for just one or two select persons, and only for a brief moment in time, and then vanish out of view, perhaps only to bewilder those who did not enjoy the privilege of catching a glimpse of them? The question is: What justifies calling an event "miraculous"? If a person cannot confirm that the event in question was actually caused by a supernatural being, how could he make the determination that the event in question is miraculous? If he could not observe a supernatural being causing the event, how could he know that the event was caused by a supernatural being?

These seem to be obvious questions, but I wouldn't be surprised if Keener does not address them, or at any rate only skirts around them without satisfying them *rationally*. We who are removed from the firsthand experience required for identifying the nature of something, are expected to take "eyewitnesses" at their word. But this says nothing about how the "eyewitnesses" themselves made the determination that what they witnessed was in fact miraculous.

Typically when a person claims to have witnessed a miracle, the worry arises that the person making the claim is drawing his conclusion in haste, perhaps out of sheer ignorance. If a person does not know what caused an event, does this ignorance justify calling it "miraculous"? Reports of miracles happening seem to occur with greater frequency among the less educated and/or more superstitious, and only come from those who have already implicitly granted metaphysical primacy to consciousness in the framework of their worldview. Judging from my own experience of individuals who have claimed to have witnessed a miracle, there seems to be a strong *desire* that what the person observed was special in some otherworldly sense, that the individual really *wants* the event she observed to have been a genuine miracle. Questioning the authenticity of the experience, or more to the point, the assessment of the experience one has had, very often meets highly-charged emotional resistance. Belief in miracles usually involves some kind of confessional investment that the identification of said event being miraculous is beyond question.

Now, one can always *imagine* that an event was supernaturally caused. But *showing* that it was actually caused by some unnatural, non-man-made agent is quite another thing. And Christians have a long history of failing to come to grips with this fact. They fail to come to grips with it because they avoid it like the plague, and they avoid it like the plague because they cannot answer it. They cannot satisfy their own apologetic refrain, "How do you know?"

When it comes to miracle-belief, however, Christians typically take the attitude that non-believers need to change their minds, while believers offer essentially nothing more than hearsay, secondhand (or further removed) reports, and legends which, like fish stories, grow with each retelling. The issue of metaphysical primacy is far from their minds. Objective epistemological methodology is not on their side. Very typically, Christians prefer to lambaste non-believers, especially behind their backs, for their disbelief in miracles. They almost seem to be saying to us, "We believed these stories on the bible's say so, why are you so thick that you don't do the same?"

Keener paints a portrait of "skeptics" which makes them appear extremely stubborn, unreasonable, unjustifiably prejudiced. He asks:

If you hold your philosophic premise so tightly because you haven't experienced it, that you doubt everybody else has experienced it, if you're willing to call hundreds of millions of people liars, to defend your philosophic premise, wouldn't it be worth rethinking whether your philosophic presupposition might be open to reconsideration?

For one thing, it is hard to see why it would bother a person if others did not believe in miracles, especially if the believer recognizes such things as miracles to be special, rare, and dependent upon witnesses for their report. People do not believe everything they hear, and it seems that adults who believe in miracles would have a mature understanding of this fact.

Keener wrote a book with close to 1200 pages defending the “credibility” of the New Testament’s miracle stories. While his stated two-fold thesis is

that eyewitnesses do offer miracle claims, a thesis simple enough but one sometimes neglected when some scholars approach accounts in the Gospels. The secondary thesis is that supernatural explanations, while not suitable in every case, should be welcome on the scholarly table along with other explanations often discussed (p. 1)

it seems that Keener is very concerned with convincing others, maybe even himself, that miracles actually do happen, which is not what his theses indicate. No doubt many people *want* to believe in miracles, and the desire that miracle claims be authentic may be a powerful motivator for someone to devote untold hours of effort, research, toil, even frustration, to the task of making them seem truthful.

John Frame tells us that “a person with a wish to be fulfilled is often on the road to belief” (*Apologetics to the Glory of God*, p. 37). And in his [debate with Jeff Lowder](#), Christian apologist Phil Fernandes states (at 1:19:01-1:19:10) that “I just believe that we are very good about lying to ourselves, and only accepting, uh, or interpreting the evidence the way we would like to.” Christians are people who hope that the New Testament’s miracle accounts are true, and many seem to take personal offense at anyone who doesn’t believe in them. (Notice how quickly Christians will attack non-believers personally simply because they don’t believe; in an influential work, Greg Bahnsen calls the non-believer “dull, stubborn, boorish, obstinate and stupid” - *Always Ready*, p. 56; no doubt many believers would say that Bahnsen slipped by leaving out ‘foolish’ and ‘arrogant’.)

Now it would seem rather strange for a Christian to scold a person for firmly holding to his position; Christians themselves pride themselves on their unflinching faith in their religious program. So for Keener to fault a person for “hold[ing his] philosophic premise... *tightly*,” seems rather hypocritical. Does he resent people for holding their position “so tightly” that they consequently do not accept Christianity’s miracle claims? Again, why would it bother someone, unless perhaps she were *insecure* about the position which she’s accepted as truth and in which she’s invested herself emotionally to believing?

Christians typically do not come across like Kevin McCarthy’s character in *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, who runs down the middle of a highway (this is toward the end of the movie), screaming and ranting that everyone’s “in danger,” risking his own life while frantically trying to warn people of something he knows to be the case given the overwhelming empirical evidence he’s seen *firsthand*. The man is scared out of his wits about the danger which the body snatchers represent, and he acts accordingly. I’ve *never* encountered a Christian who behaves according to what his worldview teaches, even though his worldview teaches not only that our mortal bodies will be destroyed, but also that our souls will be doomed to a hellish oblivion forever and ever, amen! By contrast, Keener is relaxed, completely composed, affecting the mannerisms one might expect from an orthodontist explaining a dental procedure. The psychology evident in the apologist’s actions and visible demeanor is not even approximately commensurate with the eternal consequences claimed by the Christian worldview.

By contrast, McCarthy’s character was not resentful of people who did not immediately believe his claims; he realized that his claims were outlandish. “Sure it’s fantastic,” he says, but insists that what he says is true. The point is that he was genuinely concerned for people’s safety, and was not disposed to taking umbrage at dismissals. He didn’t run around asking “Hey, if you hold your philosophic premise so tightly that you’re willing to call me a liar, well, don’t you think your presuppositions should be open to reconsideration, even a little bit?” Naturally he was frustrated, but his frustration was due to the imminent danger of the situation, not due to being personally offended because people didn’t believe him. Christian apologists *never* come across as genuinely concerned for people’s wellbeing, as one should expect given the nature of their claims. Rather, they want to debate, and they want to act as though their worldview were a “hammer” that they could use to pound people into surrendering their minds, their values, their very lives. Their concern is not for people’s safety, but for breaking their spirit.

Could it be that Christians are the *real* body snatchers?

Keener thinks that non-believers “doubt everyone else has experienced” a miracle, and apparently thinks we doubt this specifically “to defend [our] philosophic premise.” Keener doesn’t want to allow that we have much stronger defenses for our “philosophic premise” than merely “*doubt*” about what someone else may have experienced or might believe. Doubt is certainly *not* the foundation of my worldview, regardless of how much someone like Keener might misunderstand it.

I have personally met a small number of individuals who claimed to have witnessed a miracle firsthand. But I could count these persons on one hand. They represent *by far* a statistically insignificant minority of all the persons whom I have known over my life. I don’t have to doubt that “everybody” has witnessed a miracle; infinitesimally few have claimed that they did witness a miracle. So Keener comes across as grandstanding his own overstatement of the case, which does not bode well for *his* credibility (let alone the presumed “Credibility of the New Testament’s Accounts”). If Keener’s confidence in miracles and miracle claims is so solid and defensible, why does he need to distort the non-believer’s position in such a caricaturized manner? Again, the psychology behind his words seems to undermine his professed viewpoint.

So readers should see, I am wholly willing to interact with the apologist’s statements as though they were directed to *me*, to my worldview, to my position, to my approach to reality and knowledge. There’s no evasion on my part in dealing with Keener’s points here. Indeed, I am *eager* to examine these things; I am *eager* to consider what apologists say. Let the longevity of my blog vouch for this; let the *content* of my blog vouch for this.

Of the many things Keener stated in his reply to Bodkin, I found this to be the most stupendous:

... if you’re willing to call hundreds of millions of people liars...

I’ve long suspected that believers have an automatized habit of compartmentalizing their worldview statements, and that this stems from the overt internal fragmentation of their psychology which is in turn caused by the compartmentalization which their worldview foists on their psychology. James 1:8 tells us that “a double minded man is unstable in all his ways.” And here we have a Christian complaining at the prospect of non-Christians calling everyone else “liars”! Here we have the pot calling the kettle black, flat and simple. In Romans 3:4, Paul says “let God be true, but every man a liar.” Why now does Keener wince when a person calls a mere “hundreds of millions of people liars”? When Christianity calls *billions* of people “liars,” why would Keener raise this point as though it were unjustified?

Presuppositional apologists routinely tell us that non-believers “really know” that the Christian god exists, but that they “suppress” this knowledge “in unrighteousness.” If this is not an instance of Christians calling non-Christians *liars*, what would be? Quotations from the New Testament (the “credibility” of which Keener wants to defend), tell us outright that non-Christians are deliberately denying what they privately “know” to be true. Neither apologists nor the “scripture” passages which they quote, provide any *objective* evidence for what they claim; they simply repeat what they’ve read in Romans 1 as though it had the power to settle the matter, as though the act of repeating the passage in question were equivalent to *substantiating* it. The problem is: it is not equivalent, and only they assume that it has such status. If they’re trying to *persuade* anyone to their view, they should have the prudence *not* to simply *quote* the claims which need substantiating in the first place *as though* merely quoting them constituted such substantiation. Given their claim to be “led by the spirit,” their lack of such prudence only serves to undermine their claim to credibility *all the more*.

It is true that many people throughout the world are dishonest. They are dishonest to the facts, they are dishonest to the nature of their own minds. They’ve been told to believe a set of lies, and in the church pews, the mosques, the temples, etc., they affirm standardized creeds, they promise devotion, they swear allegiance. Consider a child who’s told that Mohammed was the last prophet of Allah. He’s told that Allah is the one true “God,” and he’s told that Mohammed was a real man, a holy man, the holiest of holy men. The boy is philosophically defenseless against these claims; everyone else around him believes these claims (or at least repeats them as though they believed them), and he’s constantly being urged to believe them. Nothing in his *social* experience suggests that these claims are false. And though there’s nothing in his firsthand perceptual

experience which objectively confirms the truth of these claims, he's not trained to put stock in such things anyway. He is urged to take important "truths" on others' say so; he is urged on the basis of someone's say-so to take things on someone's say-so. He exemplifies Rand's insight that "faith in the supernatural begins as faith in the superiority of others" ("Galt's Speech," *For the New Intellectual*, p. 128).

And yet, Christians call this young man a *liar*. In fact, they call *all* such persons *liars*. They're liars, not only because they've believed a lie, but because they've allegedly suppressed a truth that they know and in place of that truth they are deliberately spreading a lie, all on purpose. They spread what they believe, and what they believe is said by Christians to be a lie. They hold to it "tightly," but it is not clear whether or not they are wrong for this (it is wrong for "skeptics" to hold "tightly" to their views, but it is not wrong for religionists to do so). Rival religionists are not wrong for holding a view "tightly"; only those who allow science to lead their way through the darkness of ignorance are guilty of holding to a view "tightly," and only then is it not good.

As a Christian defending the claims of Christianity, Keener is essentially affirming that millions if not billions of people are "liars." China has roughly 1.35 *billion* people, by far the *vast majority* of whom are *not* Christian. So Christians are in effect calling all of them liars. Here in Thailand, there are barely any Christians. So nearly everyone living here is, according to Christianity, a liar. And so on. Is not Keener thus willing to call millions of people liars, in order to defend his philosophic premise? Does this give him pause to consider that maybe, just maybe, it would be worth rethinking whether his philosophic presupposition might be open to reconsideration?

By identifying himself as a former atheist, Keener seeks to ingratiate himself with "skeptics," as if to say, "I know your position, I've been there myself, and I've moved on by choosing to be open-minded," which would imply that those whom he is trying to ingratiate are not really open-minded after all. "Open-mindedness" typically implies a willingness to examine things from a different perspective, and suggests that a person is receptive to new ideas and arguments. Curiously, however, Keener's own response to Bodkin's question suggests quite a different attitude, for he acknowledges that explanations other than those pointing to miracles are available. Would not a genuinely "open-minded" stance entail willingness to consider alternative explanations?

Keener speaks of miracles as though they were happening all the time. He reports that when he was an atheist he "had seen some miracles" and "had experienced some miracles," again offering no clues as to how he made such identifications, no reasons why we should accept these claims as rationally viable. The impression which Keener wants to give is that, as an atheist, as a "skeptic," he was living in denial of "facts" which were evident all around him.

Keener cites some skeptics as saying "Well, we don't have any naturalistic explanation for this now, but maybe we will someday," and quips that "that's good enough for them." It is interesting to compare this with the attitude which many Christians have in response to the "paradoxical" nature of certain tenets of Christianity, such as the doctrines of the trinity and the incarnation, doctrines which are said to be merely "apparently contradictory," and not really contradictory at all. This attitude is not the attitude one finds in science. Science involves gathering facts to generate theories and conclusions, and in assessing certain claims, certain key facts may be unavailable at the present, but may come to light in the future, as has happened countless times in the enterprises of science. This is radically different from the attitude that the doctrine of the trinity, for instance, is merely "apparently contradictory" without really being contradictory, since it is not a matter of gathering facts to generate theories or conclusions, but rather a dogma which has been affirmed as a traditional part of Christianity and which today's believers are reluctant to question and find unfit for human consumption. In the case of the doctrine of the trinity, where would anyone go to find out further "facts" to help resolve what clearly looks like a real contradiction? Blank out.

In the case of a claim that an event was miraculous in nature, we can at least check to see if there is any evidence documenting that the event actually took place as it has been described, and then check the facts of the case to determine whether or not a "naturalistic" explanation is presently available. In the spirit of science, there is nothing wrong with waiting for additional evidence to come to a solid conclusion about something under investigation. Check with any police department and you will find that there are many "cold cases" waiting for additional facts to help solve a crime which has yet to be closed. But scientific forensics would be anathema to miracle claims, just as a proof would be fatal to religious belief: "a God susceptible of proof would have to be finite and limited; He would be one entity among others within the universe, not a mystic omnipotence

transcending science and reality. What nourishes the spirit of religion is not proof, but faith, i.e., the undercutting of man's mind" (Leonard Peikoff, "'Maybe You're Wrong'," *The Objectivist Forum*, April 1981, p. 12). If one could prove a miracle, he would in fact be proving that it was not a miracle indeed, for a proof would uncover the causality of the event in question, and causality is the law of identity applied to action. Such a proof would not and could not point to the primacy of consciousness.

Now I know of no evidence that any miracle has ever taken place. But I have ample evidence that some people really want miracles to be real, and I have ample evidence that many people are, given their worldview's assumption of the primacy of consciousness, predisposed to believing in superstitions, ghost stories, and supernatural realms. I go by the evidence. Why should I change this policy? Should I change it because Craig Keener doesn't approve of it? Should I change it because it disappoints Christians? Should I change it because it spoils the fun of mysticism? Mysticism can appear innocuous at times: belief in ghosts and fortune-tellers seems to pose no threat, and can provide a ready source of entertainment. Most people enjoy a good ghost story now and then. But mysticism's influence in philosophy is lethal, and this is what history has shown us time and time again. It is high time that people throughout the world understood this fact instead of publishing 1100+ pages of material in the attempt to validate belief in miracles.

Keener claims that there are "multiple raisings from the dead," which only makes the resurrection of Jesus seem rather mundane: it's just one of many, and no longer such a unique and principal marvel. There are many documented cases of people who have been declared "clinically dead" being revived and going on to live life as normal. The composer Arnold Schoenberg, for instance, suffered a heart attack in August 1946 and was "clinically dead" for nine minutes. After being "resurrected" by a shot of adrenaline, he lived for another five years, dying at the age of 76 in July 1951. Incidentally, Schoenberg suffered from triskaidekaphobia - fear of the number 13 - and died on Friday the 13th. Should this cause us to believe in "the paranormal"? Why is it wrong to suppose that this was just an unlucky coincidence? After all, a person is going to die *sometime*; dying on a certain day is not out of the ordinary. I'm sure many other people on the earth died that day as well.

But Keener and folks who want to believe that miracles are real, do not want to rest on "coincidence." They want their experiences to have larger-than-life significance for themselves. Keener states,

In my own circle, I mean if, if it were only a coincidence, say a one in ten thousand coincidence, how do you explain the coincidence of me having ten people in my own immediate circle who are eyewitnesses of that?

Why does this burden fall on those who are outside of Keener's circle? If Keener wants me to explain it, the explanation I would give would certainly not be far-fetched: people in Keener's circle are likely all adherents to a worldview premised on the primacy of consciousness, and thus prone to "interpreting" their experiences in a manner which continually makes allowances for mysticism in preference over the application of objective methodology to the pertinent facts. This predisposes the mystical mind towards favoring appeals to supernaturalism over scientific inquiry, and to taking anything in one's experience as confirming evidence of mystical conclusions. All along the unchecked assumption of the primacy of consciousness is the indispensable underbelly of such beliefs. So long as people continue to invest themselves psychologically in a worldview whose foundations essentially affirm that *wishing makes it so*, they will continue to tell the world that miracles are real and scorn those who do not accede.

by Dawson Bethrick

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